



Higher Education Mental Health Act of 2019

Congressman David Trone (D-MD)

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Why do we need the Higher Education Mental Health Act?

Research shows that more than 75 percent of mental health conditions begin before the age of 24,^[1] but colleges and universities are ill equipped to handle the mental health needs of today's students. From 2010 to 2015, the number of students accessing mental health counseling centers increased by an average of 30 to 40 percent; at the same time, overall enrollment in colleges and universities increased by only 5 percent.^[2] Postsecondary education offers students a new level of independence that is often accompanied by new levels of stress, for which young people need support. During this critical time of development, more than 50 percent of students between the ages of 18 and 24 reported having a severe psychological problem or experiencing feelings of hopelessness.^[3]

To address the needs of students facing the stresses of college and to support postsecondary education institutions, we need to understand the types of mental health concerns young people are experiencing and the support and services they need. A coordinated national effort that brings together advocates, experts, stakeholders and students will help ensure we address the mental health needs of our students and prove a level playing field for every student..

What will the Higher Education Mental Health Act do?

The Higher Education Mental Health Act establishes a national commission to study the mental health concerns facing students at institutions of higher education.

The commission will include stakeholders that represent disability and student advocacy groups, institutions of higher education, individuals and students with mental health disabilities and family members of students enrolled in an institution of higher education.

The bill also requires the commission to release a report at the end of its investigation that examines the services available to students with mental health disabilities and the current policies in place to assist students to remain in school and complete their degrees.

The report will also provide detailed recommendations that institutions of higher education, states and the federal government can make to improve the mental health services available to students and properly address the rising number of students with mental health concerns.

^[1] Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health, National Alliance on Mental Illness and The JED Foundation, (August 216) (available at <https://nami.org/collegeguide/download>)

^[2] 2017 Annual Report, Penn State University Center for Collegiate Mental Health, (January 2018) (available at https://sites.psu.edu/ccmh/files/2018/02/2017_CCMH_Report-1r4m88x.pdf)

^[3] See Campus Mental Health, American Psychological Association (2018) (available at <http://www.apa.org/advocacy/higher-education/mental-health/index.aspx>)